HEY sat in the warm June sunlight on the doorstep of the small wooden shanty, big Dan White, miner, and Tom Devoe, foster-parent, and for fully two minutes neither spoke. Big Dan had taken off his hat, which he turned and turned in his hands. At length he dropped

it and summed up the whole situation.
"As I understand it, Tom," said he, "you and Nancy kind of half way reckon you want to buy that restaurant over to Riley's, and go into the grubdishin' busi-ness, and your idee is to leave little Miss Devoe here with me fer two or three days while you both traipse over there and circumnavigate the proposition." Devoe said, "Yep, that's the notion." From his pocket he drew a soiled and folded sheet of paper

which he straightened out deliberately. "This here," he added, "is the restaurant's regular way-bill."

"It sounds like good kitchen sense," said Dan, "but this here soup—this consumme. What in blazes is consum-me soup?"

"Consum-me soup," said Devoe gravely, "is ghost feed. It's just yeller water a little bit diluted." Dan returned the folded menu to its owner. "didn't think you knowed how to run a restaurant, Tom, said he, "but I guess there ain't no doubt about it. Suppose you make up your mind to buy it and go it

place and dropped it in upon the lazily blazing logs. Dan was storing a loaded revolver on the topmost beam a mess, then what about little Miss Devoe?" of the dwelling. Descending he caught up his extra

SHE WENT ACROSS THE ROOM TO THE BUNK AND LAYING HOLD OF A BOOTJACK ..... SHE PROMPTLY CONVEYED IT TO THE FIREPLACE

"I'll come back here and git her, of course," Tom ssured him with alaerity. "Me and Naney don't assured him with alacrity. "Me and Nancy don't hanker to run nuthin' without her, the rest of our

Big Dan glanced about his shanty somewhat deliberately. "It don't look as if there's much she could bust while you're gone," he observed, reflectively, "and bust while you're gone," he observed, reflectively, "and I ain't hesitatin' none on that point, Tom, for I'm awful fond of the little gal, as you know, but I was thinkin' more about—" He checked himself at the verge of certain sentimental confessions and added presently: "When was you figurin' to start fer Riley's, anyhow?" "Wal—we did want to git away to-day," Tom admitted "If you ain't willin', Dan, why—"
"To day?" storgetted the gives "To day?" and

me all ready to go up to Three-mile Station, and Bet-

His sentence was never concluded, for a light, quick footstep, almost at his elbow, startled and interrupted him suddenly. He turned as a pretty vision made its appearance from around the sunny corner of his cabin, It was Nancy, Tom's wife-rosy-cheeked, bright-eved Nancy Devoe, with a bag in one hand, while on her strong young arm sat little Miss Prairie Devoe herself, roguish, winning, dimpling with smiles and instantly squirming to be placed on the ground, and extending both her baby hands to big Dan, seated on the step.

His hesitation vanished immediately. "Well, well well!" he exclaimed as he rose and took the young ster in his arms; "Good morning, Miss Devoe. Did you come to visit Uncle Dan?"

"Baby—comed—to—yove—Uncle Dan," said the tiny coquette, and she threw both her plump little arms about his neck and gave him a wonderful hug.

Nancy winked at her husband surreptitiously. "I just said that Uncle Dan would only be too glad to take care of her while we was gone," she said. "I told Tom there wasn't another man in Pose del Oro. told Tom there wasn't another man in Poco del Oro camp which I'd leave little Prairie with but you, Uncle Dan-not even Uncle Billy Partridge, and the Lord knows he's as fond of Prairie as he can be-and I'm awful glad you want her-and we're sure to be back in a week-and, Tom, the stage is 'most ready, so we'll have to hurry. They've got the trunk and I fetched have to hurry. They've got the trunk and I fetched this bag with Prairie's things—some stockings and dresses—she gits 'em dirty so fast—and wears 'em out—but Uncle Dan can mend them if they git too holey—so we'll just kiss her good-by and git started."

She descended on the speechless Dan, who was once more seated on the step, with little Prairie on his

knee, and giving the tot a warm embrace, she kissed her seventeen times in one second, tossed the bag of things inside the house, straightened out her hat upon her head and was ready to depart.

"You don't mean you're goin' right now—on this morning's stage?" said Dan at last, "and maybe goin"

to stay away a week?"

"Why, hasn't Tom been tellin' you them was our program?" answered Nancy in surprise. "Then what in the world have you been doing all this morning? Of course that's what we're goin to do, Uncle Dan, so good-by--we've got to hurry. Tom, come on."
"All right," said Tom. "You go ahead. I want to
speak to Dan for half a minute."
Dan said: "I guess I'm elected."
Tom felt not a little abashed at the manner in which

the charge had been thrust upon his friend. "I only stayed behind, Dan," said he, "to suggest that if Betsey's on your mind—Betsey Dodd, up to the Threemile Station-why maybe you could tote Prairie up there to help you do your courtin'. You know what

the little gal done for me."

Dan shook his head dubiously. "There's two things sure that ain't no help when a man's foolin' around sparklin'," he answered, "one's giant powder and the other is a little gal kid like Miss Devoe. I'll fix it up some way, Tom. You git a-goin', and good luck with

"Guess I'd better," said Tom. "I know you'll take good care of little Prairie and enjoy her visit.

boots, a frying-pan, a coffee pot and his pipe, all of.

Prairie's reach. The energetic youngster, entering fully into the spirit of shifting things about, trotted quickly to an inviting little cupboard, and laying hold of an opened can of condensed milk, rolled two precious eggs, worth a quarter apiece, right out where they fell upon the floor after which she inverted the milk can with equal adroitness and completed a rich, raw custard at her feet in the briefest time imaginable. Big Dan looked down

away-and not a cent of insurance on the place."

The youngster had discovered nothing novel in his

pockets, all of which she had rifled many times before. She therefore stood up on his knee and patted his face

a zeal that was almost fanatic.

The baby was undismayed. She tried to help. She

went across the room to the bunk and laying hold of a bootjack, that certainly resembled an ordinary piece of kitchen fuel, she promptly conveyed it to the fire-

from his high position on a stool.

"Oh, pshaw!" said he.

Miss Devoe, with the dripping can still clasped by To-day?" interrupted the miner. "To-day? — and the lid in one of her tenacious little hands, promptly all ready to go up to Three-mile Station, and Bet-made the amende feminine. She hastened to the stool whereon the man was standing and threw her arms,

can and all, about his leges. 'Baby-do-yove-Uncle Dan," she assured him

'Yes-well, I reckon a little lovin' is a dangerous thing," said Dan. He descended to the floor, took the can from his tiny guest, threw it into the fire, and for the first time observed the cheerful blazing of his With one wild dive he snatched it forth, then ener-

getically kicked it, still blazing, across the room, and flipping it bodily into a basin of water, succeeded in preserving its charred remains. In the meantime little Prairie, eager to imitate his example and to be of assistance, was doing her utmost to kick the broken eggs viscid milk toward the same supply of but with only a partial success. Unfortunately the egg stuff was slippery.

Dan turned about in time to see two tiny feet fling treacherously out and upward, and the baby sit down upon the custard with emphatic directness. He stood perfectly still and gazed at her helplessly. He said nothing, since nothing adequate arose to his mind. Little Prairie remained but a moment in the cream and golden setting, then laborously extricated her garments and her plump little person from the mess, which she turned about to view.

"Baby-made-floor-all-nife-and-clean," she imparted cheerfully. Then coming forward, both sticky hands held before her, with fingers extended till they resembled two small star fishes in distress, she added; "Uncle Dan-tate-it-off." 'Wait!" said the miner. "Wait till I kin wet a good

big rag!"
He wet three empty flour sacks, entired the baby to the steps outside the door, fetched out the bag con-taining her extra clothing, locked his cabin for better security against her further adventures and labored earnestly for one long hour before he could make the

child even partially presentable.

He was rolling up the discarded dress in a tight, hard wad, and Prairie was making futile attempts to escape his vigilance and explore the world outside his cabin, when Billy Partridge eame toiling up the trail,

a half-opened newspaper clutched in his fist. Big Dan had never been more honestly glad to behold a friend in all his life. Little Prairie was equally enthusiastic. Partridge was her adopted Uncle Billy. He promptly took her on his knee and she as promptly announced that she loved him, and proceeded to empty his pockets. Dan concealed the wad of little clothing and in glowing optimism related the facts concerning

little Prairie's temporary sojourn in his cabin.
"I'll have her all to myself—exceptin' for you, Billy," he said cestatically. "Tm goin' to let you stay with me and share Miss Devoe regular. Fact is, Billy, I've got to go and see a friend for half an hour, right away. guess I'll leave you and Miss Devoe here together while I'm gone."

"But I wanted to read this here paper," objected Billy "I only just got it in the mail. Haven't had one for a month."

"That's all right, just set here and read it, you and Miss Devoe," said Dan, whose anxiety to hasten off to his belated appointment with Miss Betsey Dodd at

"So long," said Dan. "If you see Billy Partridge, send him up here to the shack."

"Well, Miss Devoe," said Dan to the enterprising little tot, left thus abruptly to his guardianship, "you're doin' pretty fancy so far with my goods and chattels, and the shack comes next, I reckon, fer it can't git Three-mile Station had increased upon him tremendously. "Miss Devoe loves you, Billy, and she won't mind you readin' the news. She'll amuse herself a few, just playin' 'round. So long. I'll be back before you're through."

He did not wait to argue the matter, but went at once, leaving Billy feebly protesting, while little Miss Devoe already had one small foot through the paper. There was no escape. He therefore placed her gently on the ground and picking up a tiny sliver of wood, held it in his hand for the child to see.

"Tick," he said instructively. "Baby go find 'tick and bring it to Uncle Billy. Uncle Billy likes lots of

She therefore stood up on his knee and patted his face with extravagant affection.

"What's this?" inquired Dan. "Payin' the damage down in advance fer something you want to git at?"

"Baby—do—yove—Uncle Dan," was all the young-ster answered, and scrambling out of his arms she started inside the cabin without delay. Dan hastened to follow with commendable alacrity and snatching various household utensils, right and left, began to hang them and stow them away in lofty positions with a real that was almost fanatic. Little Prairie was a willing child. She started at once on her mission, searching about in the sand near the cabin, and Billy settled down to his reading. Presently his small companion returned, holding some tiny black object between her baby thumb and finger.

black object between her baby thumb and hinger.

"Tick—Uncle Billy," she said. "Tick."

"All right," he answered, without looking, "put it in Uncle Billy's pocket and git him some more."

Miss Devoe was delighted. She placed her "tick" in a handy pocket of his coat and trudged off at once for another, with which she returned very promptly.

"Tick," she informed him as before. "Uncle Billy

He indicated the pocket again and kept on reading. Back and forth and forth and back the youngster trotted, bringing "ticks" by the scores and dozens, all for the pocket of her friend. Uncle Billy had apparently solved the problem of supplying a child with in-nocent engaging entertainment.

In the meantime Big Dan had come to the much-belated tryst at Three-mile Station, and Mistress Bet-

sey Dodd was exceedingly displeased at his delay. She was a good-sized, brown-eyed, tempery young person on whom Dan's explanation acted peculiarly.

"Do you mean to tell me, Dan White," she said

"that you goin' to be an orphant asylum for that kid for maybe a week? What about you takin' me drivin' to Crystal Springs on Sunday, which is day after to-

Well, I was going to ask if maybe the weather wouldn't be pleasanter a week from Sunday," said the miner. "That's what I come up here to ask."

"Oh, you did, did you? That's all you come up for, was it, and me waitin' two solid hours fer nuthin'?" demanded Miss Dodd with ready warmth. "Well, I can just break the news to you right now that I ain't the kind you can git to play no second fiddle-do you understand my conversation?—and you can't have me and no Miss Devoe at the same time, savvy? Now

which do you decide to give up—once and fer all?"
"Give up?" echoed Dan, deeply perturbed. "Why,
Betsey, I shouldn't think, with little Prairie just a baby and you the only gal I ever—"
"That's enough. Don't go no further," interrupted Miss Dodd, imperiously. "Baby or not, it ain't my way of doin'. If you don't propose to give her up,

right off prompt, why that settles it all between you and I. Now which of us two is goin' to be?"
"But I couldn't marry Miss Devoe," protested Dan. "You savvy that!" said Betsey, crimsoning to her crown and tingling to the soles of her shoes. "You never said marry to me before—though I supposed you might git which he wisely bestowed in places too high for little off somethin' of the sort in time, you bein' a man and me a girl-but I don't expect to git flattered to death

that—and if you want to marry me, why prove it lettin' your little Prairie go and takin' me drivin' "Do you mean I've got to send her away or you'll never be my wife?" said Dan, very white about the

lips. "Is that what you mean?"
"If she stays in your house over Sunday—you bet you and me won't git married!" Miss Dodd replied with emphasis. "And that's all for this mornin'.

Dan stood looking at her oddly for a moment, entreaty in his honest eyes, then a light of cold deter-I can't throw her out like that," he said. "I guess

I'll say good-by."
He turned and walked away, Miss Betsey watching, at first indignantly, then more forgivingly, and at last, when he failed to turn and look back, with belated

regret in her two brown eyes.
"Dan," she cried. "Dan! Dan! Come back!" But the wind was against her. He did not hear, and, topping the ridge, was silhouetted sharply against the sky for a moment, then abruptly disappeared from

Worried and somewhat sore at heart, he made his way across the hills and came at length to his cabin, the end of which he rounded silently. There sat Billy still engrossed in his paper, and there was the little Prairie still trudging to and from the brush and diligently loading Billy's pocket. "Tick—Uncle Billy," Dan® heard her say, "nother

White was tremendously interested to behold this harmless subterfuge for keeping the baby out of mis-chief. He came forward quietly, while little Miss Devoe was toddling away on her mission. Billy glanced

up for a second.
"Hello-back, hey?" he said mechanically, and his mind returned to the reading.

Dan was studying Partridge's clothing curiously.
"Billy," he said in a moment, "you must be settin'
on some trouble. Your coat's alive with ants."
"What's that?" querried Billy, who had only half heard his friend's remark. "Aunt who?"

Then the baby came faithfu!ly to the step as be-

Tick-Uncle Dan," she said by way of variation. "Tick," and she held up her find. Dan saw a tiny black ant, vainly struggling for its freedom, between her thumb and finger. She had found a practically inex-haustible hill of the little black creatures and for nearly wo hours had been fetching them, one by one, to

"Man-there's a thousand ants a-crawlin' on your person!" exclaimed big Dan excitedly. "Billy, git up and shake them off before they begin to eat your car-

Ants!" cried Partridge, suddenly startled to life. "Ants!—great jumpin' Jehosaphat!"

He swept half a dozen of the frantically running

little insects from his hand at a stroke and leaping to his feet threw down his paper, tore off his coat and shook and beat it on the steps like a lunatic.

"Good gosh! there's one inside my shirt!" he said, dropping the coat and wildly hauling at the neck of his garments. "There's another further down inside! There's three on my back! They're on my legs! They're inside of me everywhere! I meet have been sittin." inside of me everywhere! I must have been sittin'—"
The baby interrupted. She had made another successful pilgrimage to her base of supplies and now

"Tick—Uncle Billy, faithful to her task
"Tick—Uncle Billy," she said as before, proffering
one more helpless ant to the man who had kept her entertained, "nother—tick."
"Smotherin' angels!" said Billy aghast at this be-

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coat! Burn it quick! I've got to git fer home like blazes and strip off my duds a month ahead of time!" He deserted his coat, his hat and his precious paper instantly, and racing down the mountain trail left the helpless Dan absolutely alone and unprotected with the tireless little girl.

Having undertaken to transfer the entire population of the ant-hill to a field of greater usefulness. Prairie had lost no time, during Billy's excitement. While Dan was engaged in beating Billy's coats she came to the steps again with a captive insect in her grasp, "Tick," she said, as in expectation of a great reward, "tick-for-Uncle Dan."

'Nasty tick! Throw him away!" said the fosteruncle emphatically. "Baby throw him away!"
"Nasty tick!" repeated the youngster, hurling the ant to the earth as directed, and then, Uncle Dan continuing to be occupied with the infested coat, she trotted off, fetched her ant as before and ejaculating, "Nasty tick!" threw it down on the boot of the miner

and frudged patiently off for another. The following day appeared to justify many of his apprehensions. Little Prairie very early succeeded in filling his Sunday boots with water and sugar, indif-ferently mixed and Billy remained away, and Betsey made no sign. Dan was finally obliged to dig up and scatter the ant-hill, after which he adopted a variant on Billy's device. He directed little Prairie's attention to a tiny speck of mica in the sand. This he picked up and placed in a gold pan, resting on the step. "Shine," he said. "Nice shine. Baby git a shine for uncle and put it in the pan."

She went to work at once, most faithfully, and at length big Dan beheld the last of her clean little dresses a torn and dusty ruin, and the knees of her tiny stockings entirely worn away.

How he got through that day and night he could never have told. Sunday morning he was heartsore and exhausted. Betsey had ignored him utterly, and little Prairie had not. It was a bright, warm morning. Seated on his doorstep he finished a flour-sack garment for the busy little tot in his keeping, and kept her at work fetching tiny specks of dross. When at length the dress he had made was placed upon her he leaned against the shack in relief—and dropped into slumber most profound.

"Oh Lord!" exclaimed Betsey."What do you know about kids?"

She lost no time in running to the rear of the cabin. There, in half a minute she discovered a hole that something had excavated beneath the cabin's foundation. Down on her knees she dropped at once and

applied her eye to the opening.
"I can't see a thing," she announced, "but I know she's there, and prob'ly sound asleep. I went under a house once myself and I know."

"If only she is! If only she is!" said the anguished Dan, in a new, wild hope. "I don't believe she can be, Betsey-but leave me look."

He got down and attempted to pierce the darkness beneath the cabin, but to no avail.

"Prairie," he called. "Prairie—baby—Miss Devoe out to Uncle Dan." There was no response. "I'll dig in and see," he said, and with all his might

and main he began to scratch away the earth to enlarge the hole.

But the sand lay in a shallow deposit over solid rock.

He was baffled in the briefest time. However, he could thrust a part of his head beneath the beam.

"I see her!—she's there!" he cried in joy that nearly overcame him. "Baby-baby! come out here to Uncle

Overcame him. "Baby—baby! come out here to Uncle Dan! She's fast asleep!"

"What did I say?" said Betsey, triumphantly. "You can't wake her up. You'll have to hoist up the house."

Dan ran for a crowbar, a block and a beam. The man was so glad he could scarcely think. But with Betsey to boss him and move his blocks and push big rocks beneath the rising shack to hold it while he toiled and pried, he lifted it up as a giant might have done, till it stood at a most amazing angle, and a bottle inside went crashing down and broke on the floor above the baby's head.

Then she waked, and Dan crawled wildly in under there and got her in his arms,

"Baby—was—tired," she vouchsafed in her engaging little way. "Baby—had—a—nap."

Billy Partridge, worried half to death, and having seen the cabin oddly tilted on its base, came charging headlong down the hill, beheld big Dan with Prairie in his arms and, grabbing Miss Betsey crazily about the waist, danced and yelled in his gladness like a boy.



her grains of sand. For fully an hour he was lost to the world. Then he finally stirred, resumed conscious-

ness and sat up to look for the child It was all in vain. The hillside was silent, deserted, mocking. In greater and greater circles the man went racing over the slopes and depressions of the hill. To every large rock or clump of rocks he sped in feverish alarm, calling as he went, and feeling a sickening dread increase in his being.

He came upon a rattlesnake, whirring out its warn-

ing from the rocks. He killed it and sweat broke out anew upon his temples and a sickening fear took pos-

Afraid to leave the place, yet afraid to permit the child to be lost like this any longer, he suddenly ran down the mountain trail at the top of his speed to Billy Partridge's dug-out shack, for he knew he needed help. Billy was there, and instantly partaking of Dan's alarm, he sped with him up to the hill and ran, in a fever of excitement, over all the slope till nearly

"We'll never see her again. She's gone," said Dan in the anguish of despair. "We've got to raise an alarm. We've got to git the whole camp out in the hills. The boys will help us to hunt."

In half an hour there were twenty men swarming-

the sage-brush slopes in an ever-enlarging circle. The alarm had spread with amazing swiftness. Miners, gamblers, teamsters, engineers-men of every occupa-tion in the camp had responded to the call to find little Prairie Devoe.

Noon had long since gone by; the afternoon was aging. Three times Dan White had returned to his shack, from the hills above, to see if the baby might not have come, through some miracle of chance. Three times he had turned away to search as before, with a groan at his lips and a dull, leaden ache in his breast. At four o'clock he was at home once more. But again, as before, he met only disappointment at the cabin. He faced the merciless expanse of sage-brush once again, but around the curve of the hill, before

he could start, appeared a figure that held him for a moment faintly hoping.

It was Betsey Dodd. She had lost her hat; she had run nearly all the way from Three-mile Station; she seemed very much distraught as she hastened, panting,

"I heard-heard little Prairie was lost," she said between her gasps for breath. "I came to help—I didn't mean to sound so nasty—the other day—I—I—Dan, do you think you've looked in every place where she

"Everywhere, Betsey; I don't know what to do," said Dan, in his mannish helplessness. Can't you think of somethin'? When I saw you comin' I hoped that maybe you'd had her all the time."

"Oh, you old crank!" said Betsey, not unsympathetically. "Say, Dan, have you looked under the house?"

"N." said Dan "of course not She saydde," of the saydde, and the saydde, and

lated discovery, "the doggone little terror of a kid has put at least a million in my pocket! Burn the

It was fully an hour before all the searchers could be summoned out of the mountains. Some, when they learned where little Miss Devoe had been all the time, were angry and disgusted. They went home,

Miss Betsey Dodd finally became discouraged in her effort to remain at the place until Billy Partridge should be gone. So, finally, when the sun was fairly sinking in the west, she started reluctantly away, with a faint hope that Dan might, perhaps, follow her to Big Dan had held to little Prairie as if he never

meant to release her from his arms again, but he gave her to Billy and walked to the summit with the prettily blushing Miss Dodd. "Betsey," he said, when they were quite out of sight, "you made me feel awful bad when you told me you

wouldn't marry me if Miss Devoe stayed in my house over Sunday—d'you remember?" Betsey had been exceedingly sorry for many things said at their last important interview, but she could not confess it all too abruptly. However, she smiled roguishly up at him as she said: "Well?"
"Well," said Dan, in nervous fear and happiness,

"she didn't stay in my house over Sunday; she stayed Betsey smiled, then a sweet, warm chuckle broke

from her heart. "I-I guess that's so," she said, and suddenly moving a step forward she kissed the unprepared miner just beneath the eye, then turned and ran for home like a frightened doe

Monday morning little Miss Devoe resumed her em-ployment of fetching tiny particles of shining sand to Uncle Dan as he sat outside the cabin clumsily sewing on the tiny dress he had carefully washed. At length she grew weary of placing all the little grains of sand in the gold pan. She wanted her Uncle Dan to look at the pretty things.

"Shine-Uncle Dan," she said, as she held one up for him to take; "nife-shine." He held out his hand indulgently, and into his palm she dropped a smooth bit of glistening material at which he stared in utter astonishment. It was a tiny

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speck of gold-a nugget no larger than the head of a In sudden excitement he granced at the pan. There, with a lot of common sand and mica, were fully a score

of similar specks that the baby had found and fetched to lay at his feet.

That afternoon Tom Devoe and his wife came back to Poco del Oro camp to announce that the trip to Riley's had been all in vain. It had cost Tom nearly one had been all in vain.

one hundred dollars to ascertain that the restaurant project was diluted consommé.

It cost big Dan less than fifty excited words to make Tom his partner in a mine of gold from which little Prairie had fetched a tiny "shine."

NEXT WEEK: Maso to the Rescue

By Ednah Proctor Clarke